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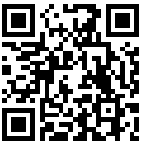

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# HILL WARFARE

ON THE

## *NORTH-WEST FRONTIER OF INDIA.*

BY

BRIGADIER-GENERAL C. C. EGERTON, *C.B.*

Allahabad

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# PREFACE.

THE conditions which obtain in the numerous expeditions undertaken against the tribesmen on the N.-W. Frontier of India vary so much from those contemplated in the Drill Book, that the following few notes are submitted by the compiler in the hope that they may be of use as a guide to the tactics which obtain in Hill Warfare against savage tribes.

It is not claimed that these notes contain anything new or original, they merely comprise in a collected form the tactics which the experience of others has found it best to adopt in the various situations which may arise in the course of frontier expeditions, and are contained in some form or other in most of the Standing Orders of regiments of the Frontier Force, the conditions of service in which embrace wide opportunities for the study of this special subject. It is hoped that by placing the results of this experience in a collected form, some of the mistakes which so commonly occur in regiments which have no previous experience in hill warfare may be obviated.

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# HILL WARFARE

ON THE

## *NORTH-WEST FRONTIER OF INDIA.*

### NATURE OF COUNTRY AND TRIBAL TACTICS.

THE means of access to the country of the tribesmen is usually either through some defile or river-bed, or over a *kotal* or mountain pass.

In nearly every case it may be assumed that the road will be both narrow and bad, requiring to be made by the Sappers and Miners before it is practicable for laden animals, and that it will be the rule rather than the exception that the latter can only advance in single file. * A brigade composed as shown in the margin equipped on the Field Service scale, with camp equipage and ten days' supplies including grain for animals, would cover on a hillroad some eight miles of road of which between five and six miles would be baggage. Indeed, on a really difficult road allowing for opening out and straggling it might amount to a good deal more. It will be seen at once what an opportunity such a long

1 Squadron Cavalry.
1 Mountain Battery.
1 Company Sappers and Miners.
2 British Infantry Regiments.
2 Native Infantry Regiments.
1 British Field Hospital.
1 Native Field Hospital.

* NOTE.—Such a brigade equipped on the normal scale would comprise in round numbers 4,000 fighting men, 2,500 public and private followers, 1,700 horses, mules and ponies, and 1,200 camels. In single file 3 mules with driver would cover 10 yards and 3 camels with driver, 15 yards.

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straggling column would offer to an active and enterprising enemy knowing every feature of the country and excelling in *guerilla* warfare, whose object it would be to harass and delay the advance as much as possible, by cutting up stragglers and *looting* baggage and supplies, unless such enterprise is most carefully guarded against.

It should be remembered that as it gets dusk the boldness and enterprise of the tribesmen increase, and it should therefore be laid down as an axiom of hill warfare that the marches should, whenever possible, be so regulated as to insure the rear-guard being able to reach camp before dark. This is not always possible, more especially if a high pass or *kotal* has to be crossed in the course of the march. The force to attack a pass, or position when opposition is anticipated, should endeavour to camp overnight within easy striking distance of its objective.

As a broad rule, it may be taken for granted that if the enemy mean fighting they will take up a position defending a *kotal*, or defile which has to be traversed by our troops, and that these once forced they will resort to night attacks, harassing convoys, following up retirements, cutting off small parties and, to *guerilla* warfare generally, all of which subjects will be subsequently dealt with under their respective headings.

## MARCHES.

In advancing into the enemy's country the order of march will be much influenced by the nature of the road,

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and whether it leads through a defile, crosses a *kotal*, debouches into an open valley or is a combination of all these conditions.

If the advance be up a river-bed from which the spurs of the hills through which it flows slope gradually away, Cavalry may be freely used to reconnoitre ahead; it being understood, however, that having once drawn fire they are not to push on until supported by Infantry, and until the hills on either side have been searched and cleared.

When the river-bed is narrow with precipitous sides, or when a hill path has to be traversed, it is obvious that Cavalry cannot be employed in advance and they should be relegated to the rear of the main body, where they are least likely to be in the way.

The following normal formation of the brigade has been found to work well under most circumstances:—

| | |
|---|---|
| Advanced guard and flankers. | 2 Troops of Cavalry (if ground admits).<br>½ Battalion Infantry.<br>Company of Sappers and Miners (for road-making).<br>½ Battalion Infantry. |
| Main body ... ... | Mountain Battery (with special escort, 1 Company).<br>2 Battalions Infantry.<br>1 Troop of Cavalry (for messengers, &c.) |
| Baggage and rear-guard | ½ Battalion Infantry.<br>1 Troop of Cavalry.<br>2nd Reserve Ammunition.<br>Field Hospitals.<br>Staff Baggage.<br>Baggage in order of units.<br>Commissariat.<br>1 Troop of Cavalry.<br>½ Battalion Infantry. |

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Each Infantry battalion is followed immediately by its first reserve ammunition, entrenching tools, medical panniers and dandies, field-stretchers and water-mules and camp-colour men when it is impracticable for these to accompany the advanced guard.

Besides the troops specially detailed for baggage and rear-guard, each unit details its own baggage guard, of 4 men per company under a non-commissioned officer who accompany their own baggage, re-adjust roads, etc., under the orders of the Transport Officer, who again will be under the orders of the Brigade Transport Officer, who will see to the marshalling of the baggage and be responsible for its moving off in the proper order of units.

It is most essential that in so long a column constant communication should be kept up between all its parts. This may be done by signalling when halted or by employing the Cavalry as orderlies if on the move.

The normal order of march may be issued as a standing order, the orders of the day merely indicating the order of the Infantry in the column, as for instance :

"Advanced guard and flankers, K. O. L. I., main body 14th Sikhs and Gordon Highlanders, rear-guard and baggage, 4th P. I."

A normal rendezvous order should also be published and adhered to. All baggage should be collected together and its advance regulated by the Brigade Transport Officer, assisted by Regimental Transport Officers.

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## ADVANCED GUARD AND FLANKERS.

As a rule, the battalion that is told off for advanced guard will also be responsible for the flanking duties. It is not possible in a hilly country often intersected by deep ravines and nullahs for this duty to be performed as in a plain by a body of troops moving along parallel to the column on either flank, but it should be done by means of small picquets placed in commanding positions which remain there until the rear-guard has come up. It will be seen that by this means not only are the flanks protected from surprise, but the rear-guard is automatically reinforced. The strength of these picquets may vary from two men to a whole section according to the necessities of the case.

It may indeed sometimes be necessary to detach a whole company, or more, to hold some particular point. This, however, would be done by the Brigadier from the main body and not by the commander of the advanced guard. Should the battalion forming the advanced guard become used up in supplying these picquets, another must be told off for the duty.

The commander of the advanced guard will brush away any small parties of the enemy that may oppose him without halting or waiting for orders, so as to delay the column as little as possible. Should, however, he come across the enemy holding any position in force, he should call a halt and await orders from the Brigadier. On arrival at the ground selected for the camping ground, the commander of the advanced guard should without orders throw out day picquets

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(the Cavalry can frequently be employed for this purpose) and place a guard over the water-supply.—(*Vide infra* Camps.)

## BAGGAGE AND REAR-GUARDS.

The baggage and rear-guards will be under the control of the officer commanding the rear battalion. He will detail the officer who is to command the rear-guard and will, with the assistance of the Transport Officers, prevent undue straggling, halting when necessary to let the rear close up. He should keep touch with the main body as far as possible, keeping himself by means of the Cavalry at his disposal informed of its position, and send information to the Brigadier, should he become too far separated from it.

In case of the troops in his front becoming engaged, he will close up and mass the baggage as near to the main body as possible, and having arranged for its protection by means of picquets, etc., will await orders.

The commander of the rear section of the column has a most responsible position, more especially when followed up by an enterprising enemy. His rate of march must be regulated by the progress of the baggage. He must see that the picquets placed by the advanced guard are withdrawn in time, and that they join in with the rear-guard. He must note carefully the nature of the country in his immediate vicinity as he goes along, with a view to holding the best available position in case of a check or stoppage in front, and he must keep himself in communication with the officer commanding the baggage and rear-guards. He

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must have a thorough knowledge of the manner of conducting retirements as hereinafter explained and possess a good eye for country.

## CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY, MOVEMENTS IN ADVANCE.

When contact with the enemy takes place, should only small bodies be met with, they should be driven off and picquets posted to keep them from returning. If the enemy is in strength and holding a position, they will usually be accompanied by standards and some rough estimate of their strength may be arrived at by the number of standards displayed. Forty or fifty men to a standard would be a fair estimate. As before stated, the position selected by the enemy will usually be the crest line of a hill over which the road passes (*kotal*) and the spurs on either side, or, the hills on either side of a defile through which the road passes. In all cases the approaches to the position will be covered by *sangars* or breastworks of stone pushed well down the spurs in front of the main position.

So long as a front attack only is made hillmen will defend their position stubbornly, but they have the greatest dread of their flank or rear being threatened or attacked, and often the mere appearance of a force threatening to cut them off or turn their position will be sufficient to cause them to abandon it. There are few positions that cannot thus be turned, though the turning movement may require more time to carry out than can be spared; but whenever

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practicable a turning movement should be made by a portion of the force, and the direct attack deferred until the flank attack is well developed.

## ADVANCING UP A HILL.

The following rules to be observed in advancing up a hill are applicable to all cases, whether troops are acting in large bodies or small:—

The advance should be carried out very slowly, more especially if the hill is a steep one, so as to distress the men as little as possible. Officers, especially young officers, are too apt to forget that while they are only carrying a sword and a revolver their men are carrying a rifle and bayonet, and from seventy to a hundred rounds of ammunition and possibly a great-coat or a blanket in addition. If two bodies of troops are advancing by two parallel or nearly parallel spurs they should mutually aid one another's advance by bringing a cross-fire to bear on the other spur, under cover of which the troops on that spur can advance from one place of cover to the next, when they in turn will cover the advance of the troops on the first spur. By this means a whole series of *sangars* can be alternately outflanked and the enemy forced to abandon them, while our losses are far smaller than they would be if each spur had been taken by direct attack only. (The same principle is equally applicable to retirements.)

On nearing the crest line of the hill, bayonets should be fixed and the firing line reinforced so as to be prepared for a

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charge of swordsmen. The supports also should close up to within thirty yards of the firing line. If there is any position from which they could bring a fire to bear on such a charge of the enemy without danger to the firing line, it should be occupied. This, too, might often be better done from a parallel spur.

When the crest is taken the firing line should immediately lie down and take cover, as the chances are that the enemy may still be within range or have taken up a position further on from which the ranges are well known to them. If, however, they are seen to be in full flight, the support should be pushed down after them with all haste, while the firing line re-forms and follows more slowly in support.

## MOVEMENTS IN RETIREMENT.

The conditions of hill warfare necessitate many operations involving retirements. Indeed, with an enterprising and ubiquitous enemy every movement in advance partakes of the nature of a retirement so far as the rear-guard is concerned, and it is in such retirements that losses so frequently occur, many of which might be avoided with a little knowledge of the principles on which to conduct them.

Reconnaissances, foraging duties and expeditions made from standing camp to visiting outlying hamlets all involve subsequent retirements, and every officer should know the general principles which apply equally to large bodies of troops and to small detachments. No reconnaissance or

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foraging party should ever leave an unoccupied defile in their rear on the road by which they must return to camp.

When Cavalry are employed for reconnaissance they should be supported by Infantry, who should take up a position at a suitable distance from camp while the Cavalry reconnoitre ahead, and cover the latter's retirement.

Reconnaissances or foraging parties should never be sent to such a distance that they are unable to return to camp before dark.

All retirements should be gradual and by successive bodies, each body in succession passing through the other and taking up a position to cover the other's retirement. In coming off a hill the supports should first of all be withdrawn and should take up some position lower down from which they can cover the retirement of the firing line. Whenever possible, retirements should be conducted down two parallel spurs so that a cross-fire can be brought to bear from one to the other. When the firing lines are withdrawn they should not be withdrawn simultaneously, but gradually until only a few of the most active men are left who should keep up a brisk fire on the enemy, who will hesitate to advance until fire ceases. Then at a given signal they should come away as quickly as possible so as to endeavour to reach the next position before the enemy can reach the last one. When casualties occur it may often be necessary to make a counter-attack in order to bring away the killed and wounded.

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Both in advancing and retiring salient spurs should always be chosen in preference to re-entering angles, and nullahs and ravines should be studiously avoided, unless their exact direction is known and the heights on either side held.

The principles of gradual retirement apply also to picquets when being withdrawn.

## CONVOYS.

One of the most frequent and trying duties incidental to hill warfare, is escorting convoys. Though the duties much resemble those of baggage guards, yet it must be remembered that the latter are preceded by the main body of the force, to which they may look for assistance in case of attack; whereas a convoy guard must depend on its own strength and disposition. Allowing for straggling a camel convoy with ten days' supplies for the force given above, would be about 4 miles in length and number roughly about 1,000 camels. To protect these adequately, *approximately* about one man per camel is required—or, say, a full battalion of Infantry per 1,000 camels assisted by two field troops of Cavalry for the conveyance of orders along the line. This proportion is fixed on the assumption that there are fortified posts along the line of communications; the strength given above would not be sufficient along a line not so protected.

The escort of a convoy should not be frittered away along the whole line, the effect of which is merely to make

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the defence weak everywhere. The convoy should be divided into sections, and a certain proportion told off for each section. Assuming a convoy of the above length, the escort might be distributed as follows :—

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced guard and flankers | ... | ... | ... | 2 companies. |
| At 1st Mile | ... | ... | ... | 1 company. |
| „ 2nd „ | ... | ... | ... | 2 companies. |
| „ 3rd „ | ... | ... | ... | 1 company. |
| „ 4th „ rear-guard | ... | ... | ... | 2 companies. |

With the exception of the two companies forming the advanced guard the companies should be kept concentrated, communication being kept up between the sections by the Cavalry. The two companies in the middle thus form a support to either the company at the first mile or at the third mile.

If a convoy is attacked it should not be halted if it can possibly be helped, but should keep moving on while the escort is engaged with the enemy. It is seldom that a convoy will be attacked *in force* without such intention becoming known, if the political information is good. As a rule, it will be only by small bodies of the enemy that such attacks are made, and generally towards dusk. Every possible effort should be made to avoid being belated, and the size of convoys should be regulated with this object in view. A march of 12 miles with camels on a hillroad would occupy ten hours. If then the head of a convoy 4 miles long starts at daylight (say, 6 A.M. in the cold weather), it will be at least two hours before the rear of the column has filed off the ground, *i.e.*, up to 8 A.M., and it would be 6 P.M. before the

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rear reached camp, a time at which in the cold weather it is already dark. A march of 12 miles therefore may be taken as the maximum which, allowing for stoppages, re-adjustment of loads, etc., can be undertaken by a convoy of this length between daylight and dark in the cold weather on a fairly good road. If there is a bad pass to cross, special arrangement should be made for holding the pass from the nearest post on the line of communications so that the convoy escort, and consequently the convoy should not be delayed. With such a pass intervening a march of 10 miles length is the most that could be undertaken.

## CAMPS.

The selection of a camping ground for any considerable force in the hills, is a matter of considerable difficulty. An ideal camp would be an elevated plateau with steep sides, the approaches to which can be commanded from the top and which is not itself commanded from the hills in its vicinity. It is, however, very seldom that a camp fulfilling these conditions can be found. The site of a camp is very frequently dependent on its water-supply, and also on the facilities for obtaining grass and firewood; and the only thing that can be done is to make the best of it such as it is. It should be as far as possible protected from what are known as snipers and should be defensible against a night attack.

On arrival at a camping ground, temporary picquets will be placed by the officer commanding the advanced guard (in the day time these or some of them may often be taken

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by Cavalry) which will remain out until relieved by the corps which have been detailed for picquet duty, under the orders of the Field Officer of the day, who will also select the positions for the night picquets. The officer commanding the advanced guard will also place a water picquet at such place as may be pointed out by the Staff Officer of the Q. M. G.'s Department.

As soon as the camp has been laid out officers commanding units will at once arrange for the defences of that portion of the outer face or faces of the camp which is assigned to them, either by entrenching or by building a breastwork of stones. When time admits and brushwood is procurable, these may be further protected by abatis. When walls are built big stones should be placed at irregular intervals along the top so that in the dark an enemy would hardly be able to distinguish them from men's heads.

Night picquets should be strongly posted in commanding positions and should be of sufficient strength to maintain themselves if attacked. Weak picquets of observation having orders to retire in case of attack, are a source of weakness and danger. They mask the fire from the camp and are very liable to surprise by the enemy, or to be shot by their own side.

Ambushes may often be employed with advantage, more especially in standing camp, to surprise small parties of the enemy's snipers. They should be sent out after dark, their whereabouts being carefully explained to the camp guards

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on that face of the camp. A successful surprise of a few of the enemy has a very deterrent effect on the practice of firing into camp.

When troops are equipped with tents they should be pitched with the ridge poles parallel to the outer line of defence, and about 10 yards from it. This gives ample room for the men to form up in case of alarm. A standard plan of camp has been adopted for hill warfare where the ground admits of it and is published by authority.

## SCOUTS.

The dress and accoutrements of our soldiers, British or Native, and the amount of ammunition they carry, severely handicap them in celerity of movement as compared with the lightly-equipped tribesman, who carries but his rifle and a few rounds of ammunition which he trusts his superior activity will enable him to use to the best effect. To counteract this, it has been found useful to employ bodies of scouts, men selected for their activity and marksmanship and very lightly equipped. Their duties are to search for the enemy and to transmit information, and also to find and point out the best paths up or down a hill by which the main body can advance or retire. Instances have been known of troops retiring off a hill being brought up by scarped precipices which they could not descend, and having in consequence been cut off by the enemy. One or two active men preceding them down the hill would have averted such a disaster by finding a practicable path.

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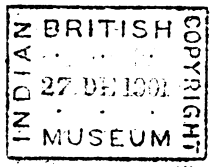
Scouts are not intended to fight, but for intelligence purposes only, though as they may frequently have to use their weapons in self-defence or to brush away small bodies of the enemy's marksmen, it is essential that they themselves should be good shots.

## FIRING IN THE HILLS.

Much ammunition is wasted in volley-firing in hill warfare. It is seldom that an opportunity occurs of firing at a formed body of the enemy in the open when volley-firing would properly be resorted to; but, as a rule, the target is against individuals or small bodies ensconced amongst rocks or behind *sangars* and against such, independent firing (controlled) is far more effective and economical. When volleys are fired the enemy watch for the smoke and duck under cover, but they cannot avoid independent fire in this way.

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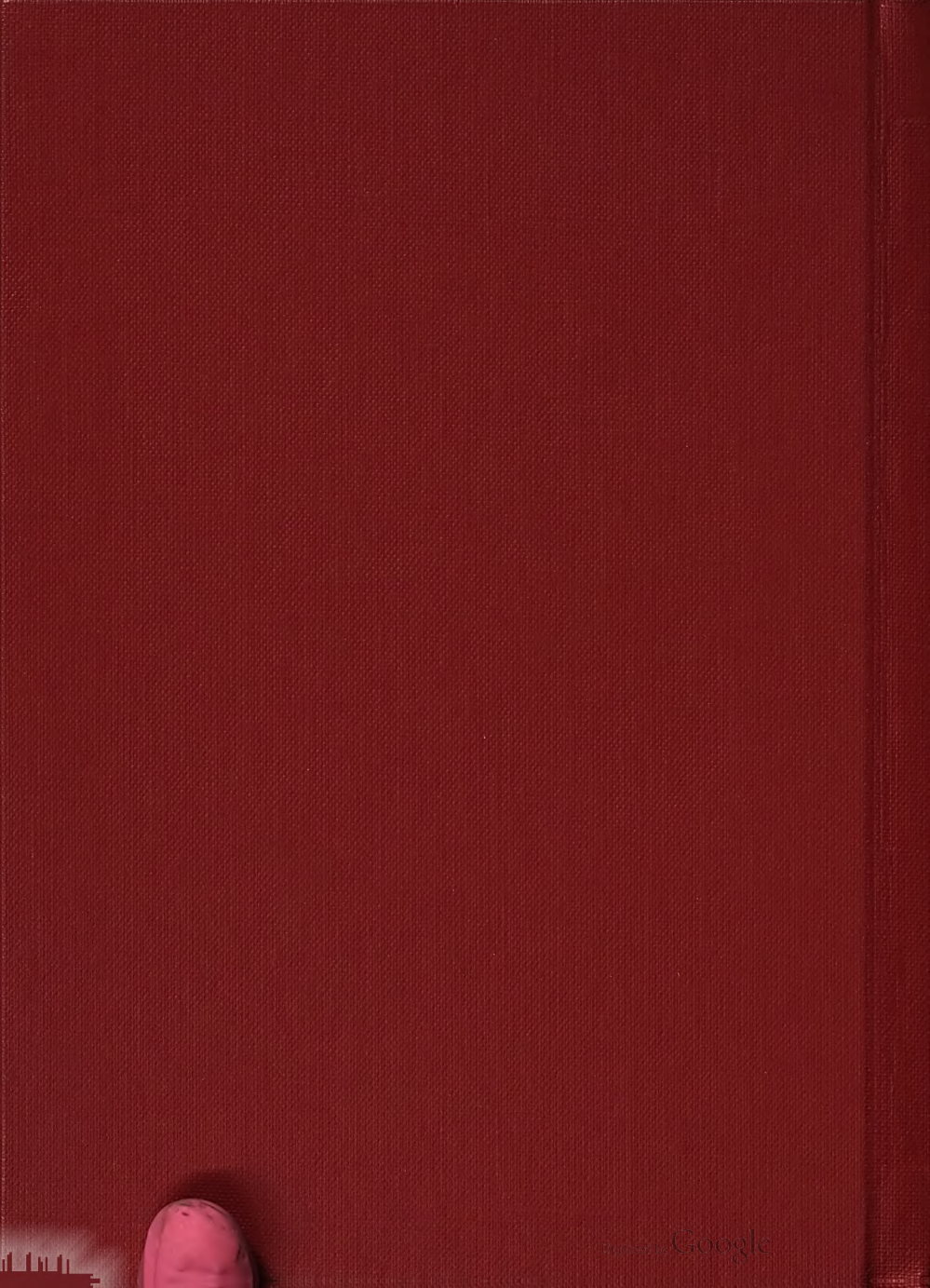
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